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A CASE STUDY OF A VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNER OF ENGLISH AS L2

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ABSTRACT

The Subject of this case study was a visually impaired teenage boy with extremely low proficiency in English as his second language (L2). The aim of the study was to look into possible internal and external causes of his problems with L2. The data was collected through classroom observation, one-to-one instruction, and a series of interviews, questionnaires, and tests. Based on the Subject's results, the Author suggested some guidelines for teaching demotivated students with a negative attitude towards learning English as L2. The paper also gives an overview of the current situation in education of the visually impaired in Croatia.

key words: visual impairment, EFL teachers, low proficiency, motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, with over 500 million people using it as their second language, that is, their L2 (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/eng>, retrieved on 26 September 2015). The knowledge of English has such a great significance in all areas of modern life, including economy, politics, etc. that it has become an essential part of almost every modern Western education system, with Croatia not being an exception. People of all ages are surrounded with English through various media (music, TV, Internet) and computer use on a daily basis, which can even enable an effortless acquisition of the language, especially in children. This is why it is rather unusual to encounter young people with extremely low proficiency in English as their L2. This case study was motivated exactly by such a case. Moreover, the boy in question suffered from a visual impairment, which made his case even more specific. Hence, the first aim of the study was to investigate if the eye condition was the only cause of his low proficiency, or if there were other external or internal factors that contributed to his situation, and to which degree.

It is quite commonly thought that visually impaired and blind individuals do not have the ability to learn or any interest in learning languages other than their mother tongues. Fortunately, the research on second language acquisition (SLA) done so far has not only disregarded this kind of prejudice, but has also shown that their inabilities might be turned from a possible hindrance into an advantage in achieving success in that area. Still, what remains is the sensitive issue of a suitable way of transferring knowledge to such students, both pedagogically and methodologically. In most Western countries, educators are not very keen on the idea of special schools for the visually impaired due to the segregation from the “normal” society that it implies (Nikolić, 1987). Hence, there is a rising tendency to integrate all children with special needs, including the blind and visually impaired, into mainstream schools. However, another problem that arises is that such schools use standardized textbooks, which are not originally meant for children with special needs. It has been proven that they can benefit from all subjects in the mainstream curriculum (Dawkins, 1991, as cited in Couper, 1996), but the need for a certain degree of material adjustment is then simply indisputable.

In Croatia, children with special needs make up around 10% of the school population (<http://www.savez-slijepih.hr/hr/clanak/7-odgoj-obrazovanje-slijepih-422/>, retrieved on 11 September 2015). Children with visual impairment are usually integrated into ordinary, mainstream classrooms, while those with additional and more severe medical conditions attend classes of elementary and secondary education in specialized institutions. Both types of institutions function in accordance with the regular educational system. The specialized institutions in Croatia are parts of *Vinko Bek Centre* for Upbringing and Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Children and Adults, with units in three Croatian cities. Even though it is not the best option if we consider the argument of segregation that separates such students even more from the rest of the society, *Vinko Bek Centre* still has its advantages. One of the greatest is that it offers rehabilitation and education that follows the curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education, but mainly with professionally competent personnel, which is something that mainstream schools lack and try to compensate for by hiring in-class assistants or by cooperating with school counsellors. This is exactly why a considerable number of parents, especially those from poorer social backgrounds, opt for the Centre rather than ordinary schools.

As already mentioned, the primary aim of this study was to obtain insights into cognitive and affective factors that might have affected the language situation of the Subject. Also, by analysing these findings, the Author tried to provide some basic guidelines for working with visually impaired students with no motivation or positive attitude towards language learning.

The paper begins with a theoretical introduction of the basic concepts used in the research, including a short overview of the context of blindness, L2 teaching, and L2 learning. What follows is the description of the study itself: a detailed profile of the Subject of the study and description of research instruments, discussion of the results obtained in the course of classroom observation as well as through one-to-one teaching practice conducted with the Subject in *Vinko Bek Centre*.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Definition of blindness

It is important to be aware of the existence of a number of nuances when determining blind individuals' diagnosis concerning their vision. The term *blindness* designates a lack of usable vision, but with remaining light perception, while *total blindness* excludes both visual and light perception (Geld & Šimunić, 2009). In Croatia, where this study was conducted, as in most parts of the world, a certain limit has been introduced to determine when one is deemed blind. When their visual acuity, i.e. the sharpness and clarity of vision, falls to 20/200 or less in their better eye with all possible corrections, they can be diagnosed with *legal blindness*. That is, in order to see, they have to stand 20 feet (6 metres) or less from an object that a normally sighted person can see from 200 feet (60 metres) of distance. Having a visual field of 20 degrees or less also qualifies as legal blindness (<http://www.idbonline.org/legal-definition-blindness>, retrieved on 20 May 2015).

Blindness differs greatly from one individual to another – from the age at which they suffered the vision loss, various degrees of visual inability that can fluctuate over a period of time, to the effectiveness of the remaining vision. People with the same eye condition can even suffer from completely different symptoms (Araluce, 2002). Some might have enough residual vision to function without great problems, while others have to deploy various visual aids to facilitate their lives. What makes the situation even more individual-specific is the fact that up to an estimated 50% of visually impaired children suffer from additional health conditions, primarily those connected with physical handicaps and emotional or learning difficulties (Couper, 1996). It is also not uncommon to find one's diagnosis not correlating with the functionality of the residual vision. Thus, a person could be diagnosed with an impairment that makes them fall into the category of visually impaired, but act as if they were totally blind (Araluce, 2002). On the contrary, there are cases of individuals with an extremely low percentage of remaining usable vision, but yet with no conspicuous behaviour that would reveal their vision problems; such is the case in this study.

2.2. Visual impairment and L2

Up until the 1980s, the majority of researchers working on blind children's acquisition of their mother tongues agreed that such children had trouble with their cognitive development, which subsequently had an effect on their L1 acquisition. For example, Dunlea (1989, as cited in Araluce, 2002) concluded that blindness affected the range of one's vocabulary in such a way that the meanings of words often stayed tied to the first context they were heard in, making it difficult for the blind children to learn to use their L1 in its breadth. Swallow (1976) was also one of the proponents of this opinion with her conclusion on blind children's "delays in locomotion and prehension as a result of lack of stimulus to explore surroundings" (as cited in Araluce, 2002, p. 52) and the effect that these delays have on their cognitive and, consequently, linguistic development. Still, there were opponents of this view, such as Landau (1997, as cited in Araluce, 2002), who argued that meanings were not based only on visual experience, supporting furthermore the possibility of blind children acquiring their L1 with very few anomalies. Claudine (1976, as cited in Nikolić, 1987) also concluded that the difference between the mental development of the visually impaired and the sighted did not reach great extents if the education of the former took place at the appropriate time. So, to this day, scholars such as Webster and Roe (1998) and Ochaita (1993), who were following the same line of thought, have managed to prove that, however deficient language input they were exposed to and despite the possible delay in certain aspects of their language development, blind children eventually mastered their native language with success (as cited in Araluce, 2002).

According to Jedynak (2011), the experience of the world is one of the indispensable prerequisites for language learning. However, this is not limited to information gained through our eyes – the importance of other senses must not be disregarded. Moreover, after vision loss, the human mind enables a newly visually impaired individual to activate his or her remaining senses with more intensity in order to compensate for the lack of what is usually considered to be the primary sense in experiencing the world around us. Thus, since the visual aspect is not indispensable for language learning and since, according to Cummins (1984), literacy skills transfer across languages, there are no scientific reasons for the absence of successful L2 acquisition in cases where there is enough competence in one's

mother tongue. In situations where vision loss occurs after an individual has learned his or her L1, such as in this case study, the potential problems with L2 learning as a result of an individual's deficiency are even less probable due to the past collection of a specific amount of visual experience (Araluce, 2002).

Furthermore, due to their increased use of senses other than sight, it has been proven that blind and visually impaired students develop abilities that can make them even more successful in foreign language acquisition than their sighted peers. The ability to acquire specific phonetics and accents of a foreign language with no theoretical background (Nikolić, 1987), improved voice recognition, and extremely trained memory (Hollins, 2000, as cited in Geld & Šimunić, 2009) are all examples of such positive adjustments made in the process of compensating for the lost sense of vision. In a 1996 study, Couper observed blind students in a foreign languages classroom at a special school. She found herself impressed with the students' intonation and a wide range of their vocabulary. Since it was highly unlikely that they had used dictionaries a lot due to the time that it consumed, this fact confirmed them having quite a "good ear" and an above-average memory.

Up until the 1970s, children with any kind of deficiency were automatically sent to special schools. The United Nations General Assembly's promulgation of the rights of the disabled from 1975 set the grounds for a new, and still existing, tendency in educational systems all over the Western world to integrate students with impairments into mainstream schools. Since then, parents of visually impaired children without other disabilities have been encouraged to place them in such educational environment that would give them the opportunity for better social integration, as well as the access to greater academic possibilities, closer to the standard of their sighted peers (Araluce, 2002). Nikolić (1987) is one of the more prominent proponents of teaching visually impaired students within the framework of the mainstream curriculum. However, he emphasises the necessity for adequate adaptation of mainstream teaching materials for such students. This is where teachers should step in. Their task should be putting extra effort into adjusting their teaching materials and methods to suit both their visually challenged and their sighted students, but without major deviations from the curriculum. Also, having the vast variability among the blind in mind, it is logical to assume that the best way for a blind student to learn an L2 is

extremely individual-specific. However, considering that it is hard to expect that all foreign language teachers had passed a training program for teaching students with special needs, scholars often advise a close collaboration between mainstream (language) and specialist teachers when addressing this issue (Araluce, 2002; Guinan, 1997).

To sum up, researchers agree that there is no scientific reason for visually impaired students to have lower aptitude for language learning than their sighted counterparts. Some of them might even be seen as more prone to a successful acquisition of a foreign language due to their intensified aural sensitivity and good memory training. Still, one must keep in mind the issue with the ongoing inclination for most visually impaired students to be put into mainstream educational settings with teaching materials originally meant for the sighted. Even with the aforementioned advantages, teachers with the ability to meet the needs of such students and the adaptation of the mainstream materials are imperative for their success. Otherwise, being in an integrated classroom without adequately educated and motivated professionals, visually impaired students are more likely to be less successful, which shows that this is primarily the problem of the support and encouragement by the educator and not necessarily of the students' language aptitude (Nikolić, 1987).

2.3. EFL teachers of visually impaired students

As it was mentioned in the previous subsection, in the last couple of decades parents have been encouraged to enrol their visually impaired children into mainstream classrooms in order for them to have equal educational opportunities as their sighted peers. Such a process most definitely requires major adjustments in the teaching programme, from using different teachers' techniques to adapting the existing materials that follow the predetermined curriculum, considering that there are no curricula made especially for visually impaired students.

In 2005, Milian and Pearson conducted a study by interviewing EFL teachers who worked in an integrated classroom with no in-class help. The teachers confirmed their reduced spontaneity when delivering lessons to visually impaired students in their classes. They emphasised the need for a more planned and structured instruction, which sometimes

led to a restriction in their usual teaching style. Despite these issues, such situations generally lead to teachers' professional improvement, seeing that having such a student in their class makes them re-evaluate and adjust their own teaching approach. As Couper (1996) said, "a group of entirely visually impaired pupils might inspire more different teaching and learning strategies than a heterogeneous group of sighted and visually impaired children" (p. 7), which shows that this is a great way for teachers to gain valuable teaching experience. On the downside, it also requires a lot of extra time for class preparation that most of them simply do not have. Furthermore, this extremely wide range of possible special needs that might come along with students' visual deficiencies makes it impossible to expect that each EFL teacher could cope well with every impairment on the list (Araluce, 2002). Therefore, many scholars, including Guinan (1997), suggest close cooperation between EFL teachers and paraprofessionals so that these evident hindrances in the process of student integration could be overcome as efficiently as possible.

Still, specialist teachers put aside, there are some teaching strategies that can facilitate the process both for teachers and for their students in the long run. One of these strategies are predictable routines, where already set teaching patterns in the classroom help visually impaired students relax without worrying that they will be unable to follow the lesson. Also, using concrete objects related to a topic in their English class, i.e. realia, that these students can touch helps them to visualise what the lessons are about. This way not only do they get into the lesson better but their background knowledge and vocabulary also improve (Herrell & Jordon, 2004, as cited in Conroy, 2005).

There also are certain qualities that EFL teachers with visually impaired students in their class should possess in order to bring the lesson to such students in the most effective way. To begin with, they should be able to understand that there is a lot more to teaching visually impaired students than just omitting visually-oriented tasks and focusing on exercises that will make them use their listening skills more. As it was already mentioned in section 2.1., students' eye conditions and symptoms may vary to a great extent, which can consequently have a significant influence on the level of their competence and performance in the classroom. EFL teachers of the visually impaired should be familiar with the time of onset of the impairment and the current limitations and abilities of each such student

(intellectual, verbal, and perceptual). As mentioned above, they should be flexible enough to adjust their teaching methods accordingly, not excluding the possibility of mixing characteristics of various techniques (Nikolić, 1987). They must be patient with such students, especially when working on developing writing and reading skills. These two skills are specifically demanding both physically and in the context of learning duration because such students recognise words at a letter level due to the difficulties with quick text scanning and skimming (Couper, 1996). Last, but not least, it is of great importance for teachers to be aware of the possible social problems that visually impaired students might face in a regular classroom. Prejudice about their inferiority, isolation as a result of them being labelled as “different”, and a raising self-consciousness of such students in such an environment resulting in negative learning outcomes are all potential situations that teachers should be prepared for. By encouraging a positive attitude and creating a supportive environment, such anxiety-inducing situations should be kept at a minimum.

2.4. Individual differences and L2

Researchers working in the field of SLA have identified a large number of individual features among students that affect their success in the mentioned process. Those features are generally referred to as individual differences (IDs). Despite the lack of unanimity about the exact taxonomy of IDs, the most recognized categories evolve around cognitive, social, and psychological features and include motivation, learner beliefs, aptitude, personality, learning style, learning strategies, and age. Wolff (2011) explains that such IDs should not be taken into account when it comes to the acquisition of a person’s L1 – the differences in this area are explained as a result of the socialization from the early years, plus the effect of bodily inflictions such as blindness – but that they are rather limited to the field of SLA. In his opinion, these features already exist in some kind of rudimentary form from the earliest age, and they continue to develop over time as a result of an individual’s interaction with the environment. Hence, he believes that IDs are dynamic rather than unchangeable, static predispositions. Consequently, foreign language teachers should ideally take them into account when organizing their materials and classroom activities in order to enable greater freedom for students to include their own experiences into the learning process.

In spite of the existence of many differences among students, the following subsections of this paper will deal only with those features that the data collected in the study is related to, that is: personality, motivation, and learning strategies. Our study is a case study of a blind teenager whose visual impairment will also be viewed as an ID, considering that it had a specific role in his learning experience.

2.4.1. Personality

Even though there are more important and more thoroughly researched differences among students that affect the process and the results of their learning in general, the impact of personality as an ID is far from negligible. In his book on IDs, *The Psychology of the Language Learner* (2005), Zoltán Dörnyei quotes Pervin and John's (2001) attempt to define personality as an ID variable that represents "those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" (p. 4). Though not without fault due to the missing explanation of the impact that situational factors might have on these elements, it is still one of the most widely accepted definitions of personality that there is. Dörnyei (2005) also defines personality traits as underlying, stable and constant properties of any human being.

There are two main taxonomies dealing with personality - Eysenck's three component construct (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1985) and the Big Five model (e.g. Goldberg, 1992, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005). In Eysenck's construct, the personality is viewed as a result of a great number of possible combinations of three major dimensions – (1) *extraversion* and *introversion*, (2) *neuroticism* and *emotional stability*, and (3) *tough-mindedness* and *tender-mindedness*. The Big Five, on the other hand, keeps the first two dimensions, while the third one is replaced with *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness*, and *openness to experience*. These five dimensions are called primary traits, which are best described with a wide range of adjectives. Depending on their score, individuals can be, for example, sociable or restrained (*extraversion–introversion*); anxious or relaxed (*neuroticism–emotional stability*); organized or unreliable (*conscientiousness*); cooperative or unpleasant (*agreeableness*); imaginative or inartistic (*openness to experience*).

Another typology that combines most of the above-mentioned personality traits is Carl Jung's theory of three bipolar types. This theory served as a basis for the most frequently used and most accurate personality type inventory - the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) created by Isabel Myers and Katharine Briggs in 1976. The MBTI contains four dichotomies, three belonging to Jung's taxonomy – *extraversion/introversion*, *sensing/intuiting*, and *thinking/feeling* – plus the fourth one distinguishing between *judging* and *perceiving* types of personality, which was added by the authors of the inventory themselves (Dörnyei, 2005). The reason why this inventory is more efficient than any other is the fact that the combinations of preferences offer sixteen possible personality types that take different contexts into account, making the inventory more than a sum of its parts (Ehrman, 1996, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005). This taxonomy is what the instrument used to establish the personality type of the Subject of this study was based on.

While the MBTI is mainly used for the identification of learning styles in the field of language learning, there is still some correlation between personality types and learning outcomes. For example, the two dimensions of personality from the Big Five model that showed some positive connection with learning were *openness to experience* and *conscientiousness*, where students with these characteristics were usually intellectually curious and productive, that is, more likely to succeed in class. On the contrary, *extraversion* has been negatively correlated with successful outcomes of learning, since extraverted students were found to be more prone to distraction and poorer learning habits (Dörnyei, 2005). Still, this kind of results should not be taken for granted, as it has been proven that these personality traits differed from one context to another, especially in the context of L2 acquisition. Matthews et al. (2000, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) mentioned the nature of language tasks to support this finding – if a task in question is more difficult and if it provides a higher level of stimulation or arousal, the extroverts' success will most probably exceed the introverts', due to the impediment that such arousal might cause in the latter group. Similarly, when presented with a speaking task, the introverts are more likely to take more time, but the speech that they produce will be grammatically more accurate.

Overall, there is no guarantee that a student might or might not succeed in mastering an L2 due to their personality traits, nor is this an issue with visually impaired students, but

they certainly do have an effect on the way that they perceive and react to their learning environment. Each student can make the best out of his or her own traits if motivated enough. As Dörnyei (2005) put it rather nicely, “Personality traits can in many ways be compared to the ingredients of a cooking recipe and it is a known fact that a good cook can usually prepare a delicious meal of almost any ingredients by knowing how to combine them” (p. 30).

2.4.2. Motivation

As one of the most important IDs that affect language learning, motivation represents the primary drive to initiate foreign language learning, and to continue working towards the goal of successful acquisition despite all the hindrances that one might encounter along the way. The fact that one’s high language aptitude and satisfying learning conditions are not enough for a guaranteed language success proves the importance of motivation as an additional factor that helps in such a long-term process (Dörnyei, 2005).

Dörnyei (2005) divides the chronology of research on motivation into three phases, depending on the researchers’ approach towards this ID: (1) the social psychological period, (2) the cognitive-situated period, and (3) the process-oriented period. In the *social psychological period*, the focus was on the relationship between L1 and L2 communities, that is, on students’ attitudes towards the speakers of the language that they were learning. According to Robert Gardner (1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005), this socio-cultural factor, along with cultural stereotypes and geopolitical circumstances, was bound to have a great effect on one’s success in a specific foreign language. As Marion Williams (1994, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) stated, learning a foreign language had an impact on the social nature of the learner, since it included the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours instead of just learning a system of rules of a language. Based on Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition that introduced a construct of *integrative motivation* as one of the most influential factors on language achievement, L2 scholars have come up with a widely accepted division of motivation into two types: (1) *integrative motivation*, the same as in Gardner’s model, which includes a desire to affiliate or even identify with members of an L2 community due to a positive and open opinion that one has about them, their culture

and their way of life (Dörnyei, 2005), and (2) *instrumental motivation* that drives one to learn an L2 for more utilitarian reasons, for example, in order to get some kind of a material (economic) or social award for one's achievement (Norris-Holt, 2001), e.g. entrance into college, a new job position, etc. Despite the fact that more students select the latter type of reasons more often, according to Norris-Holt (2001), many studies confirmed integrative motivation to be a more significant type of motivation for success in language learning because of its long-term duration.

Following the 'cognitive revolution' in psychology in the 1980s, the motivation research shifted its focus onto the cognitive aspect, designating, therefore, the beginning of the *cognitive-situated period*. The way a person perceives his or her own abilities, potentials, and limitations became a crucial aspect of motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). The classroom started being seen as a dynamic phenomenon with various contextual, that is, situation-specific factors that had a great effect on students' motivation (Kimura, 2003, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005). One example of such a factor was featured in a study by Nikolov (2001, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005). She found that her participants' positive attitude towards the L2 did not lead to success in mastering that language because they were unsatisfied with their teachers' teaching methods. Such a negative perception of their learning environment led to reduced motivation and, further on, to a lack of positive results.

Next, it was found that Gardner's integrative motivation correlated highly with intrinsic reasons for language learning, which was also the case with instrumental motivation and extrinsic reasons. According to Noels (2001, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005), *intrinsic* reasons included students' positive perceptions of the process of learning, i.e. if it was fun and challenging, and if teachers supported their autonomy and provided them with informative feedback. *Extrinsic* reasons, on the other hand, were seen as pressure that an individual felt as a driving force for success in language learning, e.g. pressure coming from teachers or parents.

The dynamic character of motivation with an emphasis on the temporal factor became the focus of the current, *process-oriented period* of research into motivation. Since motivation is an important ID that affects language learning, and at the same time varies on

a daily basis and from situation to situation, it subsequently renders language learning an extremely dynamic, varying process. As a result of a synthesis of two paradigms by Noels and Ushioda (2003; 2001, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005), Dörnyei presented a motivation construct called the L2 Motivational Self System. The construct consists of three dimensions: (1) *Ideal L2 Self*, one's notion about a person he or she would like to become, with a reference to the level of L2 knowledge, as an ultimate goal which ignites motivation towards its achievement; (2) *Ought-to L2 Self*, i.e., a sense of one's responsibilities and the attributes one believes one should possess in order to avoid possible negative learning outcomes; and (3) *L2 Learning Experience* as situation-specific motives considering one's previous and current learning environment and experience. All three dimensions corresponded to a certain degree to the previously mentioned paradigms, while the second one was also based on a concept by Higgins (1987), whose self-discrepancy theory explained motivation as a desire to "reduce the discrepancy between one's actual and ideal or ought selves" (as cited in Dörnyei, 2005, p. 101).

As seen from all of the above, motivation has been a major research topic for a long time. It has been reviewed from a lot of different perspectives, with a lot of various findings, and it still persists as one of the most important IDs related to one's success. For visually impaired students, good motivation might be of even greater significance than for the sighted ones when discussing factors that affect students' attitudes towards foreign language learning. Their impairment might be a demotivating factor that furthermore causes anxiety and unwillingness to participate in the lessons, and the chances are that good motivation has the ability to prevent such a negative learning outcome.

2.4.3. Learning strategies

According to Rebecca L. Oxford (1999), learning strategies are "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language" (p. 518). Even though this definition seems to explain the construct in a sufficient manner, it still does not clarify the difference between an ordinary learning activity and a strategic one. Moreover, Dörnyei

(2005) insists that they represent such a construct that they might not even be considered an ID at all. As can be seen from Cohen's definition of strategies as "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner" (1998, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005, p. 162), they are not treated as a characteristic of a learner but as a process that he or she engages in, which makes their classification as an ID questionable. Still, as it has been noticed that good learners share a capability of developing various strategies and actively using them to achieve preset goals, Dörnyei (2005) acknowledges the existence of a kind of a "trait-like strategic potential" that links learning strategies with successful learning outcomes.

Unlike the one by Oxford, O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) definition of language learning strategies revolves around the cognitive aspect. They see these strategies as cognitive skills, as thoughts and behaviours of individuals that help them learn and comprehend new information. They developed one of two main taxonomies of learning strategies, with the other one done by Oxford in 1990, who put them into six classes: *cognitive, memory, metacognitive, compensation, affective, and social strategies*. O'Malley and Chamot, on the other hand, grouped them into only three, depending on the type of processing used:

- 1) *cognitive strategies* (e.g. repetition of new information, grouping new linguistic items, summarizing, using visual images) that correspond to Oxford's 'cognitive' and 'memory' strategies;
- 2) *metacognitive strategies* (e.g. analysing, planning the organization of a discourse, selective attention for key parts of a lesson) that correspond to Oxford's 'metacognitive' strategies;
- 3) *social/affective strategies* (e.g. cooperation with peers, questioning for clarification, self-talk aimed at reducing anxiety about a task) that correspond to the remaining three strategies by Oxford. (1990)

Now, let us go back to the issue of the key aspects that make a learning activity strategic. If one uses visual images in order to learn new linguistic information better, does it automatically make him or her a strategic user? Weinstein et al. (2000, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) claimed that there were three essential features of learning strategies: *goal-*

directedness, intentional invocation, and effortfulness. Yet, Macaro (2001, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) pointed to the fact that these three were also key features of motivation, which in result equated strategic with motivated learning. In order to use a learning strategy, one must indeed be motivated to do so and this inevitably creates links between motivation and learning strategies, but not all learning strategies are suitable or useful for all motivated students, nor are all learning activities considered strategic for each of them. In 2003, Ehrman et al. (as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) confirmed that learning strategies were neutral when out of context, meaning that they only became useful once they were, above all, suitable for an L2 task in question, used intentionally and effectively by the student, and if they fit that specific student's learning style. Based on these factors, one learning technique may be strategic for one student, while being non-strategic, that is, not as helpful for another. This type of relativity is not surprising, seeing that learning strategies also vary across different cultures and disciplines; differences in strategy use can be found even between genders (Dörnyei, 2005).

What is also important to note is that learning strategies are processes that can be taught and trained. So, in order to make use of the aforementioned students' strategic potential in the best way possible, teachers are encouraged to activate strategy training in their classrooms. Raising their students' awareness of the existence of strategies and providing them with enough controlled practice and feedback on the use of strategies that each individual student finds most suitable for himself/herself generally results in a more motivating learning environment and produces learning outcomes of better quality (Dörnyei, 2005).

3. THE STUDY

This study was motivated by the Author's teaching practice that took place at *Vinko Bek Centre*. It involved a visually impaired teenage boy with extremely low proficiency in English as his L2. After the first part of practice in January 2014, two questions arose:

- 1) What are the causes of the boy's low proficiency in English?
- 2) What is the best way to approach visually impaired students who seem to show low motivation for L2 learning?

These issues became the main aims of the study. The first and the more specific aim was to investigate possible internal and external reasons of the Subject's low L2 knowledge. The possible internal reasons were looked into through the analysis of psychological aspects of the Subject as a learner with specific individual characteristics. In order to establish possible external reasons for his low proficiency, the study focused mainly on the social aspect of his life and education before arriving to *Vinko Bek Centre*. The data was collected with the use of several instruments and steps that helped identify the probable reasons for his lack of success and motivation for English. The study contained the following:

- 1) observation of the Subject in his learning environment,
- 2) various language tasks,
- 3) interviews,
- 4) questionnaires and tests (an online 16 personalities test; a previously validated questionnaire on motivation and EFL learning; Strategy Inventory for Language Learning).

The second and the more general aim of the study was to try to provide some basic guidelines to approach unsuccessful visually impaired students based on the interpretation of the results obtained.

3.1. The case study

Case studies are qualitative types of research whose aim in this context is to provide an insight into the specificities of individual learners (or groups of learners) within specific learning settings. They are usually conducted over a longer period of time, making them a part of a longitudinal approach to research (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This case study is a combination of an exploratory and intrinsic type. It fits into the first type, seeing that one of the aims was to try to explore the causes of this particular learning situation, while having no clear predetermined outcomes. It is also an intrinsic case study because the conduct of the research was driven by a genuine interest in this specific boy's case – visual impairment combined with low proficiency in English as L2.

Crabtree and Miller (1999, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) emphasise close collaboration between the researcher and the subject as one of the greatest advantages of a case study. This is exactly what enabled a better understanding of the boy's view of his learning situation in this research, as well as a more thorough insight into his own account of the effect of the social context that he found himself in, which is of great importance when observing a subject or a phenomenon in any case study (Yin, 2003, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008).

3.2. The Subject's profile

At the time of conducting this case study, the Subject was 18 years old. He suffered from Stargardt's disease (juvenile macular degeneration). It is an inherited disease that causes a progressive loss of central vision, with a slow onset between the ages of 6 and 20, which is then followed by rapid deterioration until the point of legal blindness (<https://www.macular.org/stargardt-disease>, retrieved on 27 April 2015). The Subject's eyesight had started degrading when he was 8 years old, reaching a point of stagnation after a short while. About 5 years later, a drastic drop over the period of 6 months had left him visually impaired with only 5% of residual vision on both of his eyes, with a chance of complete vision loss at any point in his lifetime. However, at the time of the study, the boy managed to use his remaining vision rather effectively, being able to watch television, run up

and down the stairs, go out with his friends, etc. He had no problems recognizing people's silhouettes from afar. From up close, he could even see faces of others quite well by looking at the point between their eyebrows, rather than directly into their eyes. People suffering from this type of eye degeneration usually lose their colour recognition as well (<http://www.blindness.org/stargardt-disease#vision-fading>, retrieved on 20 May 2015), which was not the case with the Subject. Seeing that macular degeneration also affects the perception of light, making it more difficult for the Subject to accommodate his eyes in conditions of alternating power of light, he used a laptop for studying both inside and outside of the classroom. The font size of his documents was enhanced to 20 and the zoom level to 140% in order for him to be able to read while, still, holding his head close to the screen. He had never been taught to use Braille.

The Subject lived and attended classes in *Vinko Bek Centre*. At the point of conducting the observational part of this study, he was in his third grade of high school, in the training program for telephone operators. His English classes took place in a conjoined class made of two otherwise separated ones, along with four other students. Each student had a different visual impairment or condition. Still, their low-vision aids did not differ much – four students, including the Subject of the study, had large-print books, while one boy used a normal print book.

The Subject started learning English at the age of 11. At the time the study was conducted, his level of proficiency was extremely basic and he struggled to complete the lowest requirements for a passing grade each semester. He claimed he had difficulties with other languages as well, making them his least favourite school subjects altogether. He liked repairing electronic equipment in his free time, that is, his interest shifted towards more technical subjects, where he had no trouble obtaining good or very good grades. Other than when learning for his classes, the only English language that the Subject was exposed to outside the classroom was through English-language TV shows that he watched with Croatian subtitles. He did not listen to any foreign language music. When he browsed the Internet, he searched for Croatian web sites exclusively or, if that was not possible, he used a translating tool in order to switch from English to Croatian.

3.3. Research instruments and the procedure

As already listed in section 3, there were four types of instruments used in this case study. Chronologically, the first instrument used was the observation sheet designed to observe our Subject in his classroom. The observation was originally meant to be aimed at all pupils in the class, but as the boy (later to become the subject of the study) drew our attention with his extremely low level of writing skill, the focus shifted entirely onto him. One more observation was conducted in the following week. For the purpose of this study, sufficient information on his behaviour in the classroom was collected during these two classes, which made additional observation unnecessary.

All of the remaining instruments were used in the period of one-to-one instruction with the boy, which took place about one month after the observation and lasted for 10 school classes over the period of three weeks. The second instrument consisted of various language tasks that were adjusted to the boy's level of understanding and distributed to him during the instruction. Reading and writing tasks were prepared with special attention given to font size and included simple, easily recognizable pictures (see *Appendix I*). Most of the language tasks focused on practising grammar rules that were previously explained thoroughly to the boy, with a gradual introduction of "new" vocabulary that appeared in the tasks in question.

The third instrument consisted of a number of interviews. They were carried out during the break between the two classes during our teaching practice. The questions were clear and specific, and the boy's answers were written down by the Researcher. The first couple of interviews were held in order to obtain basic information about the Subject's visual condition from both his and the medical point of view, as well as about his social background. Our aim was to find out more about his everyday life and learning practices and environment, including the schools that he had attended prior to *Vinko Bek Centre*. The aim was, as well, to gain insight into his attitude and thoughts about English as a school subject, about his teacher and his teaching methods, and about foreign languages in general.

Finally, we used questionnaires and tests to test specific individual differences of the Subject in order to obtain a better insight into how they (could have) affected his level of proficiency in English as L2. The test dealing with personality was taken from <http://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test> (retrieved on 19 April 19 2014) and determined his profile according to the Myers–Briggs typology. The Subject’s motivation was measured through a previously validated questionnaire on motivation. Since this test, as well as the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) used for establishing his learning strategies, was presented orally to the Subject in order to save time, some of the points from the test were discussed more thoroughly with him.

Zóltan Dörnyei’s (2005) synthesis of various researchers’ theories, including his own, on key learner features mentioned in this paper (personality, motivation, learning strategies) served as the theoretical base for our interpretation of the Subject’s most interesting answers from the questionnaires, as will be seen in the succeeding subsections.

3.4. Results and discussion

3.4.1. Social environment

During the Researcher’s teaching practice held in *Vinko Bek Centre*, a number of short interviews were conducted with the Subject. In the process of gathering information for a more thorough insight into his medical and educational history, one of the most prominent factors affecting his current situation was his social environment, with focus on his family, friends, and teachers. From the very beginning of his English instruction in elementary school, the Subject had had trouble comprehending the language. He said his English teacher was good, but she could not pay enough attention to all the pupils due to a large number of children in one class. As a result, the Subject never mastered the basics of English, nor did he get an opportunity to be provided with extra individual clarification, so he kept falling behind. He managed to obtain passing grades only because of his regular homework submission (which was done by his colleagues). At the end of elementary school, he fell under the bad influence of his friends. This factor, combined with the deterioration of his eyesight that started taking place at that time, eventually caused him to fail one grade, prolonging his unadjusted elementary education for one more year. Due to his behaviour,

his parents did not expect a lot of success from him in terms of his education so he received no encouragement at home. Once they realized that he indeed had severe problems with his vision, they initiated the process of enrolment into his first year of secondary education in *Vinko Bek Centre*. Even though the Subject came from a relatively stable socioeconomic environment, his parents were unable to provide him with the kind of education that he needed due to a serious lack of teachers trained to work with children with special needs in the rural area where he lived.

Due to a procedural oversight in the process of enrolment, the Subject arrived at *Vinko Bek Centre* only a year and a half later than expected. The period of time in between he spent in a high school that, once again, did not cater well for his needs. This kind of environment continued to be a demotivational factor. He felt left out and ignored by his teachers. Once he arrived at *Vinko Bek Centre*, his attitude towards English started improving due to new possibilities, such as the use of learning facilitators, participation in smaller classes with students he could relate to, etc. In one of the interviews, the Subject said that he noticed quite an improvement in his mastering of English, even though that level was far from what would usually be expected from an 18-year-old student after seven years of learning English as L2.

The aforementioned problem of a lack of specialized teachers in mainstream schools is not only a problem in smaller towns and cities, as is the Subject's hometown, but all over Croatia. Not to mention the lack of English teachers with specialized training for working with impaired students. In their 2006 research, Conroy et al. investigated possible challenges of educating English language learners with visual impairments in the rural parts of the United States and confirmed the existence of a great shortage of trained teachers. In certain parts of the USA, all special educators are required to obtain a licence for teaching English as a foreign language, which is quite a praiseworthy rule that has the potential to reduce the number of inadequately educated professionals in schools all over the world. However, despite the fact that a great percentage of English teachers participating in the study obtained additional education in the field of working with students with special needs, the majority still felt they needed an extra person in class that would be of assistance to them, the best option being a paraprofessional. In Slovenia, this problem has been approached

through cooperation between teachers expecting a visually impaired student's arrival into their class and the professionals from the Institute for blind and partially sighted in Ljubljana (Kozamernik, 2011). A similar process takes place in Croatia, with typhlo-pedagogues preparing both mainstream teachers and visually impaired students for integration into the regular classroom (<http://www.savez-slijepih.hr/hr/kategorija/presjek-obrazovanja-slijepih-443/>, retrieved on 11 September 2015).

Considering that the teachers in *Vinko Bek Centre* are obliged to use materials prescribed by the mainstream curriculum, they have to handle the additional task of adapting these materials to the possibilities of their visually impaired students. The teachers participating in the above-mentioned research also modified their materials by, for example, making enlarged versions of the materials in question, providing their students with tactual models representing items from pictures in their textbooks or by printing complete materials in Braille. They pointed out that it took them a lot of extra time to find adequate materials and prepare for their English lessons. The cost of transcription of ordinary materials onto Braille also represents quite a problem. Since *Vinko Bek Centre* is seen as a special care institution, rather than an educational one such as other state schools, the Ministry of Education provides resources accordingly. Despite the existence of Braille-photocopying technology in the mere institution, this proved to be insufficient for acquiring more visual aids and transcriptions of textbooks into Braille due to frequent changes in the editions of textbooks that have to be used in class.

3.4.2. Eye condition

Since the Subject's disease was not something he knew he was born with, the sudden deterioration of his eyesight in his early teenage years presented a great shock for him. Indeed, this change happened in the period when the boy did not find school to be very important, but it had an even more negative impact on his attitude towards learning and school in general.

Even though one might quickly jump to the conclusion that the Subject's eye condition represented a great impediment for him in the process of studying and learning,

his attitude at the time of conducting the study was surprisingly positive and he rarely even mentioned it as a hindrance. Finally being in the right type of school, he accepted his condition and was even among those with the most effectively used residual vision in *Vinko Bek Centre*. He used a large-print version of the textbook along with his laptop. This was tiring for his eyes, but he never referred to it as a problem. This indicated that he did not consider his impairment to be a reason for his low proficiency.

The fact that the boy had never been taught to use Braille might show to be a problem later in his life, considering the constant possibility of his eye condition degrading to a point of complete blindness. It would be best if he received some kind of basic instruction in Braille reading to assure that, if he ever lost his eyesight completely, he would be prepared for such a change.

3.4.3. Proficiency

At the beginning of our one-to-one instruction with the Subject, it was necessary to establish the level of his proficiency in English as L2. The first step was, therefore, to try to engage in a meaningful conversation with him. The Researcher asked him to say something about himself, i.e. basic information such as his name and surname, his birthplace, his interests, etc. Seeing that he could not get past the point of saying “Hello, my name is...”, the speaking skill assessment was put to an end, considering that the result was sufficient to establish that the boy was at a completely basic level. His writing skill was assessed next. As the boy was not able to think of a meaningful text to write in English without the use of a dictionary, he first said what he wanted to write in Croatian and then the Researcher translated it for him to write it down on his laptop. The result showed that the boy’s writing skill was also extremely low. He did not understand the concept of the English phonetic alphabet, as he wrote the majority of English words as they are pronounced in Croatian (for example, “wi” instead of “we”; “nider” instead of “neither”; “haus” instead of “house”; see *Appendix II* and *III* for more examples). For the same reason, his reading was not above basic. Interestingly though, this was the skill that he enjoyed the most, in spite of it being the most tiring activity due to his impairment. He explained this by saying that it was one of the rare occasions where he got to actively participate in the lesson. He could ask the professor

for new vocabulary clarification as well, without being a hindrance to other students and to the flow of the lesson. Finally, when it came to the listening skill, the level of his understanding of a text from the textbook basically evolved around specific words that he translated and memorized before the assessment took place. Had there been no pre-listening tasks or vocabulary-based preparation, the Subject would have most probably been unable to understand the text whatsoever.

Even though the Subject noticed some improvement since the transfer to *Vinko Bek Centre*, the level of his skills was far from what would be expected from an average 18-year-old Croatian student who started learning English at the age of 11. The final conclusion was, therefore, that his proficiency level in all four skills was not above basic, making it hard to objectively assess which skill he used best. His English teacher decided to adjust himself even more to make it possible for the boy to pass this subject. Hence, he had the privilege of being prepared for his oral examinations by receiving questions in advance. This kind of facilitation could have had a positive effect on the boy's motivation to make an effort to learn with understanding. Unfortunately, this was not the case due to his long-lasting habit of learning educational material by heart, as will be seen in the following subsections.

According to Cummins (1984), a student should be on, at least, a minimum level of competence in his or her primary language in order to start developing proficiency in L2 with success. One of the studies confirming this finding was the one conducted by Carson et al. (1990, as cited in Guinan, 1997) where it was seen that visually impaired students who had great problems with reading in their L2 could not distinguish between pronouns and their referents both in L2 and in their mother tongue. The Subject of this study indeed confirmed that languages, including his own mother tongue, were his weak spot, so establishing the level of grammar in an individual's mother tongue as a point of comparison might be a good idea for future approaches in similar cases.

3.4.4. Personality

In order to determine the main facets of the Subject's personality, we used an adapted online version of a questionnaire on personality with 60 rateable statements based

on the Myers–Briggs typology. The questionnaire was orally translated to the Subject in order for him to solve it. The results retrieved from the website showed that the Subject had an ESFP personality, with E standing for Extraverted, S for Sensing, F for Feeling, and P for Perceiving. Such individuals enjoy social interaction, they are absorbed in practical matters rather than abstract thinking, their focus is on cooperation, and they are extremely relaxed, refusing to worry too much. The boy himself confirmed having all of these personality characteristics.

So, did this affect the Subject's success in English as L2 in any way? It was a bit hard to analyse the boy's current success based on his personality due to his learning history, but the results offered an insight into the kind of language tasks that he would benefit the most from (once he mastered the basics of English). So, as it was seen in the already mentioned research that had been done on this topic (see subsection 2.4.1.), his extraversion could produce both good and bad results in the area of learning. Repetitiveness and analytical tasks are not a good way to motivate an ESFP personality, which is one more argument that goes in favour of more creative ways of teaching English to such a student than just literally going by the (text)book. Unfortunately for learners that shared the boy's personality type, the observation done in several English classes in *Vinko Bek Centre* revealed the predominant use of the latter mode of teaching. There should have been more tasks that develop oral communication skills, as this was what the boy and such students were most likely to be better at than solving repetitive grammatical exercises.

3.4.5. Motivation

Motivation is possibly the most important factor included in defining a person's potential success in learning; this case was not an exception. The questionnaire on motivation and learning of English as L2 that was used in this research enabled a better insight into the Subject's motivation. The questionnaire was divided into four parts.

The first part of the questionnaire tried to determine whether the Subject could envision himself as a successful user of English in a range of different situations. This is how one's Ideal L2 self is usually defined. Looking at the Subject's results, it was not difficult to

conclude that his idea of his Ideal L2 self was pretty vague, due to the circumstances of his learning situation. He was not very motivated for achieving a higher level of proficiency in English, as he ranked the statements such as “I can imagine myself speaking English to students from other countries” and “I can imagine myself taking part in a lesson held in English with no problems” with a “2” (*False*). What is a bit illogical, however, is the fact that he confirmed the statement “I believe that I will be able to read and understand the majority of English texts if I continue studying English” to be true for him, while at the same time he ranked the statement “I can imagine myself reading newspapers and magazines in English” as false. This might diminish the validity of his answers or, on a more positive note, show that the boy still believed that he had the potential for learning English, but only if that potential was treated in the most suitable way. Moreover, he did not find the statement “I believe I have the ability to learn English” to be completely false for him, indicating further on that he believed he had the potential to learn enough English to have a successful basic conversation with a foreigner.

This potential showed during the course of one-to-one classes conducted with him in *Vinko Bek Centre*. He displayed a slight yet noticeable degree of interest in solving the language tasks he was presented with, despite, in his own words, a complete lack of talent for languages. This can also be confirmed through the results from the second part of the questionnaire. He ranked the statement “I really like learning English” with a solid “3” (*Neither true nor false*), explaining that it depended on some other factors, in his case the most important factor being the person who teaches. He claimed that if he had been studying with somebody on an individual basis from the mere start, he would have been more eager to actually learn the language. He highlighted the importance of his teacher’s attitude towards the lesson, as well as the level of suitability and attractiveness of his or her teaching techniques.

The second part of the questionnaire also included a social factor in the statements, which clarified whether his motivation was more of an intrinsic or extrinsic type. In her study from 2001, Ushioda (as cited in Dörnyei, 2005) found that the nature of successful students’ motivation could mostly be explained in these two ways – (1) through intrinsic factors and satisfaction with their learning situation, and (2) through their personal, instrumental goals

that they kept pursuing in their learning process. According to this finding, the Subject's results showed some signs of the second type of motivation, the extrinsic one. Namely, he considered good knowledge of English to be an important skill of any educated person, and he recognized it as an advantage for qualifying for a better-paid job. Still, despite him feeling it was a shame he never got to master such an important language, the bits of the instrumental motivation that he showed were not enough for him to actively start learning from the beginning. Moreover, further oral clarification of his answers revealed that he thought he would never get another chance to learn it well, since he did not plan to continue his education after high school. This is exactly what explained his lack of motivation to try.

The third part of the questionnaire concentrated mainly on the Subject's potential anxiety and the way it might have had an impact on his motivation and performance in English. Though anxiety is usually seen and treated as an ID for itself, it was not included as a separate section in this study considering that it was not a prominent factor in the Subject's case. This was confirmed by the fact that the boy ranked the majority of the statements such as "I would be uncomfortable if I had to speak English to a native speaker" or "I am afraid that I will look stupid because of the mistakes I make when speaking English" with a "3" (*Neither true nor false*) or "2" (*False*). What is a bit confusing again is that his answers revealed his personal dissatisfaction with his reading skill, as well as him agreeing with the statement "I get uncomfortable when I have to read a whole page written in English", seeing that he enjoyed reading the most. Also, he agreed that listening was the skill that he had most problems with, while at the same time he ranked "I get upset when I am not sure that I understand what I am hearing in English well" with "2" (*False*). Therefore, his answers revealed the existence of a dose of peer pressure and anxiety after all. Still, these two factors did not have a great negative effect on his learning situation at the time of conducting the study – although they had possibly had a greater effect on his performance in elementary school.

The last part of the questionnaire focused on the Subject's opinion on the class that he was in, the improvements that might have been made in order to improve the quality of the teaching–learning process, etc. He found learning of English an interesting activity, which was again a bit contradictory to his attitude towards languages in general. "If I had the

chance to speak English outside the classroom, I would speak English most of the time, using Croatian only when necessary” was not applicable to him at all, which confirmed his lack of interest in developing high proficiency in English. The English classes that he was attending at the time of the study did not suit him at all. He said that his teacher should explain the language material better, as his inability to understand what was going on in class made the whole learning experience additionally uninteresting and demotivating. Also, he would have ideally liked completely new teaching materials. He was not satisfied with the way the content was presented in their textbook and he would have also preferred if there had been more topics closer to his generation’s interests. Even though adjusting topics is not an easy task due to the restrictions of the curriculum, teachers of the visually impaired could perhaps distribute questionnaires at the beginning of each new semester in order to see their students’ interests. The results could then be used to modify the existing topics in a more motivating way through the following semesters.

The Subject’s dissatisfaction with the motivational aspect of the materials usually meant for mainstream classrooms was not surprising at all, since the creators of existing EFL textbooks usually address this problem by accentuating the graphical element. That is, they put a large quantity of vivid pictures and illustrations following the lessons, which results with highly cluttered layouts not applicable to visually impaired students. This makes the question of motivating them even more important and complex. The best solution would be a creation of a textbook intended exclusively for students with visual impairments, with attached realia, audio materials and suitable tasks. In her study from 2005, Araluce developed a tactile resource pack related to the topics from most of the textbooks used in the Spanish educational system. The results showed that not only did the resource pack help the visually impaired students understand the learning content better, but it also made the lessons more interesting for their sighted peers. Hence, it helped the teachers engage the whole class in the learning process.

Despite the impairment of his vision, the Subject claimed that he would find his English classes more interesting and motivating if the topics from the lesson were presented primarily via video clips (preferably from *YouTube*), followed by questions about what was seen and heard. Finally, the interviews held with the boy after solving the questionnaire

summed up his rather expected opinion – his English classes did not hold his interest at all because he did not understand most of what was going on in there. Moreover, as seen from the Chomskyan perspective (1965, as cited in Guinan, 1997), the critical period for language learning, that is, the “language acquisition device” innate to all children that enables them to learn languages without much theoretical explanations and lasts till about the age of 14 had already passed. This was the factor that made the Subject’s tendency towards English learning even less existent.

Wolff (2011) claims that positive learning experiences gained by an individual might have a great effect on their beliefs about learning or on motivation, which is applicable in this case. The Subject’s teacher confirmed that the boy reacted extremely positively when achieving a positive grade, which further on motivated him even more. Unfortunately, this kind of instrumental motivation was usually short-lived due to a number of deficiencies in other fields of his learning experience, such as the lack of genuinely beneficial learning strategies, as will be seen in the next subsection.

All in all, the Subject’s motivation was rather unstable; it would fluctuate from situation to situation. These hints of motivation that appeared from time to time would fit into the instrumental category, even though such goals (e.g. a higher grade) were not long-lasting because of his growing disbelief that his L2 situation would change for the better. This negative belief, along with the missing crucial parts of his learning situation and a lack of motivation made the concepts of the boy’s Ideal and Ought-to L2 selves modest and unambitious. It seems that most of the time his ideal language version of himself was simply the one that managed to pass the subject, even if it meant passing it with the lowest grade according to his teacher’s criteria. Accordingly, in order to achieve this, his Ought-to self was the one that learned all learning content by heart, as will be seen in the following subsection.

3.4.6. Learning strategies

The Subject’s preference for specific learning strategies in L2 learning was measured with the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) whose scales are based on Oxford’s

strategy taxonomy. The categories of learning strategies that it measures are: (1) remembering more effectively (memory strategies), (2) using all your mental processes (cognitive strategies), (3) compensating for missing knowledge (compensation strategies), (4) organising and evaluating your learning (metacognitive strategies), (5) managing your emotions (affective strategies), and (6) learning with others (social strategies). The Subject's average scores on each category showed that none stood out on the basis of frequency of use. More specifically, the majority of the strategies were "Usually not true" or "Never or almost never true" for him. There were only five statements, out of fifty of them, that he ranked with "Usually true of me" but they were scattered all over these six categories with no logical pattern. According to Yamamori et al. (2003, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005), low-frequency use of learning strategies should not be automatically equated with unsuccessful learning, or vice versa, considering that the results of the frequency of one's strategy use does not give an insight into its effectiveness. However, this boy's low language proficiency showed that this was clearly not the case. Had he had enough support or guidance in the process of learning in his life, including a more thorough explanation of learning materials and good learning strategy training, he would have most probably developed efficient strategies to improve his learning situation.

One of the interviews with the Subject revealed that the only way he learned and prepared for his English classes was by re-reading the texts multiple times and remembering the lessons by heart, with barely any understanding of the content. What was interesting is that the SILL results did not indicate a higher frequency in the category of memory strategies. This may be because learning by heart, or rote learning, is a strategy that does not include a factor of understanding of the content, just a mere and intense memorization of the form. The Subject developed this strategy while he was still in mainstream schools in order to obtain a passing grade, considering that the lessons have already become too advanced for him to understand.

Since the development of good memory is a characteristic of most visually impaired students (e.g. Hollins, 2000, as cited in Geld & Šimunić, 2009), it would be logical to attribute it to their deficiency in visual perception. In the Subject's case, however, this might not be so. On one hand, the Subject could see enough to read a text, but the ongoing activity of

reading did render him fatigued. Relying on good memory, therefore, helped him reduce the number of times required for him to read a text and learn the important bits of it by heart. On the other hand, having the Subject's low motivation for learning languages in mind, his good memory could also be explained as a means to "get it all over with" as quickly as possible. Rating the statements such as "I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English" and "I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English" with "Never or almost never true of me" again confirmed the absence of noticeable motivation for structured, meaningful learning.

3.4.7. Classroom observation

The observations of the Subject in his English class took place prior to one-to-one work done with him. This subsection will describe the first out of two observed classes. The lesson started with a revision of a lesson from the previous class. The teacher was reading sentences from a task out loud and the students had to read their answers. He was speaking English most of the time, whereas the students predominantly used Croatian, even when the teacher addressed them in English. The Subject did not participate unless he was specifically called out; even then he was not able to give the answer himself but he relied on the help of the boy sitting next to him.

The lesson continued with a listening activity via a CD player. After the second listen, the teacher asked if there was any need for a complete translation of the text. The students declined his offer, but the Subject seemed a bit lost. Considering that the boy usually wrote new words down along with the translation in order to be able to manage through new texts later on, the offered translation would have helped him, but he probably did not want to interrupt the flow of the lesson. Instead, when the students were given subsequent tasks, his friend translated the important parts of the text for him, which slowed him down and prevented him from following the pace of the lesson. During the lesson, the teacher would occasionally approach the Subject's desk in order to see if he needed any extra help; in one of the interviews the boy confirmed that this was the teacher's ordinary practice. This was one of the perks of being in a smaller class, which improved the learning situation of the Subject.

One of the following tasks asked the students to find specific phrases inside the text. Even though all students had enough residual vision to read from a large-print version of the textbook (with the exception of one student who read from the standard version), this kind of task was hardly suitable for somebody with a visual impairment. The observation of the Subject's class, as well as of other classes with different students, confirmed that the teacher did not have the habit of adjusting the tasks from the mainstream textbook or introducing new, better suited ones. Instead, he usually skipped the ones that he saw as inappropriate for the visually impaired. The reasons for this were most certainly the teacher's high workload that obstructed the preparation of his own materials, as well as his lack of training for working with children with special needs. These, along with the lack of the needed financial support from the Ministry of Education, are only some of the major problems concerning the education of the visually impaired that were already mentioned on multiple occasions in this paper (see subsections 2.2. & 3.4.1.).

The upside of the classes in *Vinko Bek Centre* was the size of the classrooms, which facilitated a more individualized teacher-student approach. This is usually a great problem in most foreign language classrooms. As Wolff (2011) argues, in spite of the findings concerning the enormous variety of IDs among students, most teachers still stick to a model of teaching where IDs and students' needs are being neglected in favour of following a certain, hypothetical model of what traditional language teaching "should" look like. Instead of a textbook-dominating approach with teachers' omnipotence, he suggests teachers giving greater learner autonomy to their students, and providing them with a great variety of materials from which they could choose the most suitable ones for their individual needs. They should also encourage students to express their ideas based on their own experiences, which would then bring the learning content much closer to them, enhancing their motivation to learn as well. However idealistic it might seem, and special needs put aside, alternative schools such as Waldorf and Montessori show that catering to individual learner differences is indeed possible and effective.

3.4.8. Teaching practice

According to Nikolić (1987), it has been shown many times that visually impaired children who were put in less than motivating and/or adequate educational settings still had the ability to learn a foreign language well if given the opportunity. In *Vinko Bek Centre*, the Subject of this study was given a new chance to develop his learning proficiency in English, but what was key here, though, was his attitude towards the language in question. This is what the teaching practice intended to change for the better.

As already mentioned in subsection 3.4.3., one-to-one instruction was initiated with a set of small assessments of the Subject's four basic language skills. Since his language production showed to be extremely basic, any progress that the boy achieved from that point forward was considered significant. The instruction took place during a period of approximately three weeks with a set of two school periods every few days. In each first period of the set, the boy was presented with some grammar rules with thorough explanations about their use, followed by a number of relatable examples. The second class was usually spent by going through a variety of language tasks and practising grammar rules from the anterior lesson. Despite the fact that all of the tasks were carefully adjusted to his level of understanding, the Subject always requested extra clarification in Croatian. The boy was also given homework after each set of instruction; the fact that he would sometimes not do it, depending on the difficulty or quantity of the tasks in question, also showed a lack of discipline that he should ideally have obtained through his previous years of schooling.

After eight classes dedicated to language development, the results were the following. As confirmed by his own English teacher, there has indeed been a slight improvement in the Subject's attitude towards English and his language skills as a result of enhanced one-to-one English classes. One of the most probable reasons for this progress was better motivation caused by the Researcher's encouraging attitude, according to what the boy himself said in one of the interviews. Even though he, again, learned by heart and the real understanding of the new language knowledge was not completely achieved, this showed that the Subject still had the potential to learn to use English on a slightly higher level. Given his self-affirmed lack of talent for languages in general, as well as the fact that

the line of the critical period for language learning was already far behind him, the best way to achieve this would most definitely be through one-to-one instruction. It would provide him with a lot more attention and explanations to help him build his proficiency from the very basics of the language, without him feeling as a hindrance to other students. His teacher should be enthusiastic enough to stimulate positive motivation towards L2 learning, ideally with as many creative tasks as possible, including various letter and word games (Kozamernik, 2011). Special attention should be given to oral work, as it is the best way for beginners to start developing their proficiency in a foreign language (Nikolić, 1986; Yearley, 1978, as cited in Couper, 1996). It would be best if he was worked with consistently, several times per week. Patience is also key in his case, considering his need for pauses due to the fatigue caused by his eye condition. Hence, a slower and more thorough way of teaching should be insisted on, without putting too much emphasis on theory in order to avoid him going back to his strategy of learning by heart. It would be good if he joined other visually impaired students in an EFL class in the later stages of the learning process. This way he would be able to reap the benefits of group work, one of them being the division of parts of tasks among group members according to each student's abilities and learning pace, which would make achieving a goal simpler and more effective (Nikolić, 1987). All of the techniques and advice listed above can be applicable to students with the same language situation as the Subject, though special attention must always be paid to their type of visual impairment, given the vast variety that might appear.

Looking at somewhat alternative approaches, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), i.e. teaching non-linguistic subjects through a foreign language, might be another good way to produce and maintain a higher level of students' motivation to learn an L2. In the boy's case, there is a good chance that technical subjects, which he was generally good at, delivered to him in English would have made him more motivated to learn, and at the same time helped him acquire the language with less of a struggle. What makes CLIL a good teaching approach is the facilitated ability for students to set more realistic and personalised learning objectives rather than to define abstract linguistic concepts that they might not understand so well (Wolff, 2011). The visually impaired might benefit from this even more, given the realia that could be used in such classes. However, due to all other

factors already mentioned in the Subject's learning situation, it would be hard to expect CLIL to have extremely good results before the boy learned the basics of his L2.

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible causes of low proficiency in English as L2 in young adults with the example of a visually impaired 18-year-old boy living and studying in *Vinko Bek Centre*. Contrary to the expectations obtained prior to the study, the focus was not so much on the Subject's eye condition as it was on his social background and his individual differences as a learner of English as L2. The results of the instruments used in the study confirmed the crucial importance of motivation and the role of the educator from the first contact with the language. The Subject's potential success in L2 was minimized by a lack of encouragement and a teacher inadequately prepared for working with a child with special needs. Due to this poor early intervention and the inappropriateness of learning materials with regard to his eye problems, his motivation was never stimulated in the right way, nor was he ever introduced to learning methods and techniques that might have made his learning experience easier and more effective.

Even though it might not be very useful to generalize on the basis of one case only, considering a great variety of possible learning differences between individuals, the Subject can be seen as a representative of other visually impaired, unmotivated and educationally neglected children. By looking into the results of teaching practice held with him, it can be concluded that, however slim the chances might be, such students still have the potential to achieve a more significant progress in English if approached properly. A motivated teacher, patience, regular instruction with adequately adapted materials, and strategy teaching that would help them start using techniques for a full understanding of the language instead of plain memorizing are key elements that might lead to language improvement.

As far as the current tendency of integrating children with visual impairments into mainstream schools goes, one must admit that it is a very praiseworthy idea with a lot of

potential benefits for such children. However, there is still a lack of sufficiently educated personnel, plus current teachers are overloaded with additional work required to adjust the prescribed materials to students' special needs. Impaired children are also still treated as *special* in largely sighted groups, which results with them being singled out, and the size of most mainstream classes makes teachers unable to cater to each student's individual needs. These are only some of the most prominent problems that still need to be worked on. Cooperation with typhlo-pedagogues and other paraprofessionals, well-prepared teachers, greater sensitivity, and financial support by the Ministry of Education for the much-needed adjustment of teaching materials are some of the goals that would enable the process of integration without negative effects on the visually impaired, resulting in a reduced number of students with unfulfilled potential.

Even though a researcher can get the most out of a case study when it is conducted over a longer period of time, various reasons prevented the possibility of conducting this study longitudinally. Still, if it were conducted over a period of, let us say, one whole year, it would have probably resulted in an even more detailed insight into the causes of the Subject's low language proficiency. Since the study included one-on-one instruction as well, it would also be interesting to see the potential progress that the Subject would have achieved in that period of time.

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Sažetak

Ovo se istraživanje bavilo slučajem slabovidnog učenika s izuzetno niskom razinom znanja engleskog kao prvog stranog jezika. Cilj je istraživanja bio istražiti moguće vanjske i unutarnje razloge njegove jezične situacije kroz analizu kognitivno-afektivnih faktora i potencijalnog utjecaja okoline. Podaci su se prikupljali kroz hospitaciju na školskim satovima engleskog u centru "Vinko Bek", kroz individualni rad s učenikom te nizom kraćih intervjua, upitnika i testova. Ispitanikovi su odgovori analizirani i u kontekstu pitanja edukacije slabovidnih i slijepih osoba u Hrvatskoj te su poslužili kao baza za davanje smjernica za budući pristup slabo motiviranim učenicima kao što je to bio slučaj s ispitanikom ovog rada.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

EMOTIONS & FEELINGS (emocije i osjećaji)

Match the following emotions to correct pictures (Pridruži sljedeće emocije odgovarajućim slikama):

AFRAID

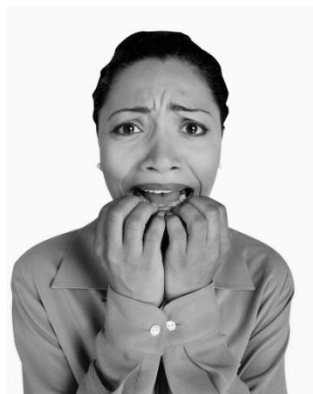
ANGRY

CONFUSED

HAPPY

SAD

SURPRISED



APPENDIX II

3. Present perfect simple ili continuous

I have broken / I have been breaking a glass. I am sorry

A Why is your face so red

B I have run / have been running

He has written / has been writing a book. I saw it in
bookshop.

He has written / has been writing a book for a year. It will
be finished soon.

They have watched / they have been watching five videos of
reading.

The children are very quiet they have watched / have been
watching video all morning.

APPENDIX III

Ona uvijek priča urnebesno smijesne viceve

She always tells hilarious

Ona je vrlo umorna

She is very tired

Ona je apsolutno iscrpljena nakon gramatičkog testa

She is absolutely exhausted after the grammar test

On je stvarno bijesan na marku

He is really furious with Mark.

APPENDIX IV

Dictation

In many countries the number 13 is considered to be very unluck^{unlucky}. In France, there is even a ban^{ban} with the number 13. In the United States^{States}, modern^{modern} high-rise buildings avoid the floor that follows 12 as 14. The ~~idea~~^{idea} goes back at least to Norse mythology^{Norse mythology} in ancient times. There was a legend^{legend} with 12 gods^{gods}. Loki, the spirit of mischief^{trick}, decided to join without being invited^{without}. In Christianity^{Christianity}, this theme was repeated^{repeated} at the last supper. Jesus Christ and his apostles^{apostles} numbered 13 people at the table.

27 wishes

F

APPENDIX V

Šifra: _____

Datum: _____

MOTIVACIJA I UČENJE ENGLESKOG JEZIKA (m)

Pred tobom se nalaze tvrdnje kojima se ispituje motivacija za učenje engleskog jezika.

Ovdje nema točnih i netočnih odgovora: ono što je važno jest tvoje mišljenje. Molimo te da daš odgovor koji najbolje opisuje tvoje mišljenje. Hvala ti na pomoći!

PRVI DIO

Molimo te da odlučiš u kojoj mjeri se svaka tvrdnja odnosi na tebe te svoj odgovor označiš na priloženoj skali od 5 stupnjeva.

1	2	3	4	5
uopće se ne odnosi na mene	ne odnosi se na mene	niti se odnosi niti se ne odnosi na mene	odnosi se na mene	u potpunosti se odnosi na mene

Mogu se zamisliti kao netko tko odlično govori engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Kad razmišljam o svojoj karijeri u budućnosti, mogu se zamisliti da koristim engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti u situaciji u kojoj razgovaram na engleskom s izvornim govornicima.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti da razgovaram na engleskom s učenicima iz drugih zemalja.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti da govorim engleski kao izvorni govornik.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti da pohađam školu / idem na fakultet gdje se nastava provodi isključivo na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti kako tečno pišem emailove/eseje na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti kako bez poteškoća pratim filmove i TV serije na engleskom jeziku (bez prijevoda na hrvatski).	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti kako bez poteškoća pratim nastavu na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti kako bez poteškoća čitam knjige na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu se zamisliti kako bez poteškoća čitam novine i časopise na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5

Stvari koje želim raditi u budućnosti zahtijevaju da znam engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Vjerujem da imam sposobnosti potrebne za učenje engleskog.	1	2	3	4	5
Vjerujem da ću moći uspješno pisati na engleskom ako nastavim učiti engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Vjerujem da ću uspjeti dobro savladati engleski jezik.	1	2	3	4	5
Vjerujem da ću moći čitati i razumjeti većinu tekstova na engleskom ako nastavim učiti engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Vjerujem da ću dobiti odličan ili vrlo dobar iz engleskog na kraju godine.	1	2	3	4	5
Mogu pratiti tempo nastave.	1	2	3	4	5

DRUGI DIO

Molimo te da odlučiš u kojoj mjeri se svaka tvrdnja odnosi na tebe te svoj odgovor označiš na priloženoj skali od 5 stupnjeva.

1	2	3	4	5
uopće se ne odnosi na mene	ne odnosi se na mene	niti se odnosi niti se ne odnosi na mene	odnosi se na mene	u potpunosti se odnosi na mene

Učenje engleskog mi je važno zato što bi obrazovana osoba trebala znati engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Učenje engleskog mi je važno zato što će me nastavnik više poštivati ako budem znao engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Moji roditelji misle da moram učiti engleski ako želim biti obrazovana osoba.	1	2	3	4	5
Moram učiti jer bi me bilo sram da nemam dobru ocjenu na kraju.	1	2	3	4	5
Učenje engleskog mi je važno jer u budućnosti zbog znanja engleskog mogu imati veću plaću.	1	2	3	4	5
Moram učiti engleski jer ako neću učiti, moji roditelji će biti razočarani.	1	2	3	4	5
Učim engleski zato što moji bliski prijatelji smatraju da je to važno.	1	2	3	4	5

TREĆI DIO

Molimo te da odlučiš u kojoj mjeri se svaka tvrdnja odnosi na tebe te svoj odgovor označiš na priloženoj skali od 5 stupnjeva.

1	2	3	4	5
uopće se ne	ne odnosi se na	niti se odnosi niti	odnosi se na mene	u potpunosti se

odnosi na mene	mene	se ne odnosi na mene		odnosi na mene
----------------	------	----------------------	--	----------------

Postanem nervozan i zbunjen kada trebam govoriti na satu engleskog.	1	2	3	4	5
Brine me što će prijatelji u razredu misliti o meni kada govorim engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Bilo bi mi nelagodno razgovarati na engleskom sa izvornim govornikom engleskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5
Osjećao bih se nervozno da upoznam izvornog govornika engleskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5
Strah me je da će me smatrati glupim zbog pogrešaka koje činim kada govorim engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Bio bih napet kada bi me stranac pitao za upute na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
Često zablokiram kada trebam napisati tekst na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
Brine me što će nastavnik misliti o mojim pogreškama kada mu predam svoj esej na pregled.	1	2	3	4	5
Osjećam se nelagodno kada pišem na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
Plaši me pomisao na ocjenjivanje sastavka na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Osjećam pritisak kada trebam napisati tekst na engleskom, a vremenski sam ograničen.	1	2	3	4	5
Zabrinut sam prije vježbe čitanja ako znam da će biti ocijenjena.	1	2	3	4	5
Čitanje na engleskom me čini nervoznim.	1	2	3	4	5
Uhvati me osjećaj nelagode kada trebam pročitati cijelu stranicu teksta na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
Postanem nervozan kada prilikom čitanja ne razumijem sve riječi.	1	2	3	4	5
Osjećam se obeshrabreno kada pomislim na čitanje teškog teksta na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Više bih volio da samo učim govoriti engleski, a ne i čitati.	1	2	3	4	5
Ne smeta me čitanje u sebi, no ne osjećam se ugodno kada moram čitati na glas.	1	2	3	4	5
Zadovoljan sam kako čitam na engleskom.					
Gledanje filma na engleskom bez prijevoda me čini nervoznim.	1	2	3	4	5
Postanem nervozan kada trebam riješiti neki zadatak slušanja na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Najteža stvar u engleskom za mene je svladati slušanje.	1	2	3	4	5
Više bih volio da samo učim čitati engleski, a ne i slušati.	1	2	3	4	5
Napet sam kada trebam pratiti sat samo na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Uzrujam se kada nisam siguran da dobro razumijem ono što slušam na engleskom.	1	2	3	4	5
Postanem nervozan kada prilikom slušanja na engleskom ne razumijem sve riječi.	1	2	3	4	5

ČETVRTI DIO

Molimo te da odlučiš u kojoj mjeri se svaka tvrdnja odnosi na tebe te svoj odgovor označiš na priloženoj skali od 5 stupnjeva.

1	2	3	4	5
uopće se ne odnosi na mene	ne odnosi se na mene	niti se odnosi niti se ne odnosi na mene	odnosi se na mene	u potpunosti se odnosi na mene

Zbilja volim učiti engleski.	1	2	3	4	5
Veselim se satu engleskog.	1	2	3	4	5
Učenje engleskom mi je zbilja zanimljivo.	1	2	3	4	5
Da imam priliku govoriti engleski izvan učionice, govorio bih engleski većinu vremena koristeći hrvatski samo kada je to nužno.	1	2	3	4	5
Da znam dovoljno engleskog i da imam priliku, često bih čitao na engleskom (časopise, tekstove na internetu i slično).	1	2	3	4	5
Nastava engleskoga jezika je upravo onakva kakva mi odgovara.	1	2	3	4	5
Sve što radimo na satu engleskog je dovoljno zahtjevno i mnogo naučimo.	1	2	3	4	5
Sve što koristimo u nastavi je prilagođeno našim interesima.	1	2	3	4	5
Sve što koristimo u nastavi je prilagođeno našim potrebama.	1	2	3	4	5
Nastava je često monotona i dosadna.	1	2	3	4	5
Često mi se čini da je ono što radimo prejednostavno.	1	2	3	4	5

DEMOGRAFSKI PODACI

1. Spol: Ž M 2. Dob: _____ 3. Razred: _____

3. S koliko godina si počeo učiti engleski? _____

4. Učiš li još neki drugi jezik osim engleskog? DA NE

Koji? _____

Gdje učiš taj drugi jezik?

u školi

u privatnoj školi stranih jezika

drugo:

Koliko dugo već učiš taj drugi jezik? _____

5. Jesi li ikada proveo duži period (najmanje 3 mjeseca) u zemlji gdje je materinji jezik engleski?

DA

NE

APPENDIX VI

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Version for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English

Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) © R.L.Oxford, 1989

Korean version prepared by Park Bun-seon, Kwon Mi-jeong, Hwang Jung-hwa, 1998

Background Questionnaire

1. Name		2. Date			
3. Age	4. Sex.	5. Mother tongue			
6. Language you speak at home.					
7. Language you are now learning.					
8. How long have you been learning the language in #7?					
9. How do you rate your proficiency in the language in #7, compared with other students in your class?					
(Circle one of these options):		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
10. How do you rate your proficiency in the language in #7, compared with native speakers?					
(Circle one of these options):		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
11. How important is it for you to become proficient in the language in #7?					
(Circle one of these options):		Very important	Important	Not important	

12. Why do you want to learn the language in #7? : interested in the language. interested in the culture. have friends who speak the language required to take a language course to graduate. need it for my future career. need it for travel. other (explain)		
13. Do you enjoy language learning? (Circle one of these options):	Yes	No
14. What other languages have you studied?		
15. What has been your favorite experience in language learning?		

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement. On the worksheet, write the response (1,2,3,4, or 5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.

1. Never or almost never true of me. 2. Usually not true of me.

3. Somewhat true of me. 4. Usually true of me. 5. Always or almost always true of me.

NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE OF ME

means that the statement is very rarely true of you.

USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME.

means that the statement is true less than half the time.

SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME.

means that the statement is true about half the time.

USUALLY TRUE OF ME

means that the statement is true more than half the time

ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME

means that the statement is true of you almost always.

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Put your answers on the Worksheet. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes 20 – 30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.

EXAMPLE:

1. Never or almost never true of me.
2. Usually not true of me.
3. Somewhat true of me.
4. Usually true of me.
5. Always or almost always true of me.

Read the item, and choose a response (1 through 5, as above). And write it in the space after the item.

I actively seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers of English.

You have just completed the example item. Answer the rest of the items on the Worksheet.

Part A

I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.

I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.

I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.

I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.

I use rhymes to remember new English words.

I use flashcards to remember new English words.

I physically act out new English words.

I review English lessons often.

I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.

Part B

I say or write new English words several times.

I try to talk like native English speakers.

I practice the sounds of English.

I use the English words I know in different ways.

I start conversations in English.

I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.

I read for pleasure in English.

I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.

I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.

I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.

I try to find patterns in English.

I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.

I try not to translate word-for-word.

I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

Part C

To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.

When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.

I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.

I read English without looking up every new word.

I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.

If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

Part D

I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.

I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.

I pay attention when someone is speaking English.

I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.

I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.

I look for people I can talk to in English.

I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.

I have clear goals for improving my English skills.

I think about my progress in learning English.

Part E

I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.

I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.

I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.

I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.

I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.

I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Part F

If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.

I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.

I practice English with other students.

I ask for help from English speakers.

I ask questions in English.

I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.